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RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHPS #0274 0871527
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 281527Z MAR 06
FM USOFFICE PRISTINA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5954
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS PRISTINA 000274

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE, AND EUR/SSA, NSC FOR BRAUN,
USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: POLICE TRYING TO CURB INTERETHNIC VANDALISM

Sensitive But Unclassified; Protect Accordingly.

¶1. (U) Since March 2004 no ethnic Serbs have returned to live in Zhiti/Zitinje, a village in multi-ethnic Viti/Vitina municipality in southeastern Kosovo. In September 2005 Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government completed the reconstruction of 33 houses in Zhiti/Zininje, 29 for ethnic Serb families and 4 for ethnic Albanians. On March 19 looters entered nine of the reconstructed -- but as yet unoccupied -- Serb homes, damaging three of them. According to police reports, the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) detained six ethnic Albanians from the nearby town of Balans and recovered all but three of the items reportedly stolen. The KPS increased the number of its patrols in the area.

¶2. (U) In September 2005 the heads of 14 ethnic Serb families reportedly had expressed interest in returning to Zhiti/Zitinje, but changed their minds because of persistent looting there. An estimated 20 Serb families from Zhiti/Zitinje live in the nearby town of Partesh in Gjilan municipality, which had been considered as part of a decentralization pilot project in summer 2005. The UNHCR's regional representative in Gjilan told PolFSN March 23 that Kosovo's Housing and Property Directorate, recognizing that empty houses attract looters, is considering taking over the unoccupied homes for use by Roma IDP families currently living in Vranje, Serbia.

¶3. (U) According to police reports three ethnic Albanian teenagers admitted on March 17 to causing damage at a Serbian cemetery and Serbian Orthodox church in Ferizaj/Urosevac. The youths told police they damaged the Serb tombstones and broke several windows of the church "for fun.⁸ One of the youths was detained overnight at a detention center in nearby Gjilan. All three were set to appear in a Ferizaj court later in March.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT. Combatting nuisance-level interethnic crime in Kosovo may seem like trying to shovel the ocean. By its actions in these Ferizaj and Zhiti cases, the KPS shows determination to at least to send a message to Kosovo Serb residents and IDP's that vandalism with an apparent interethnic motive will not be condoned even if it cannot

always be stopped. END COMMENT.
GURIAN